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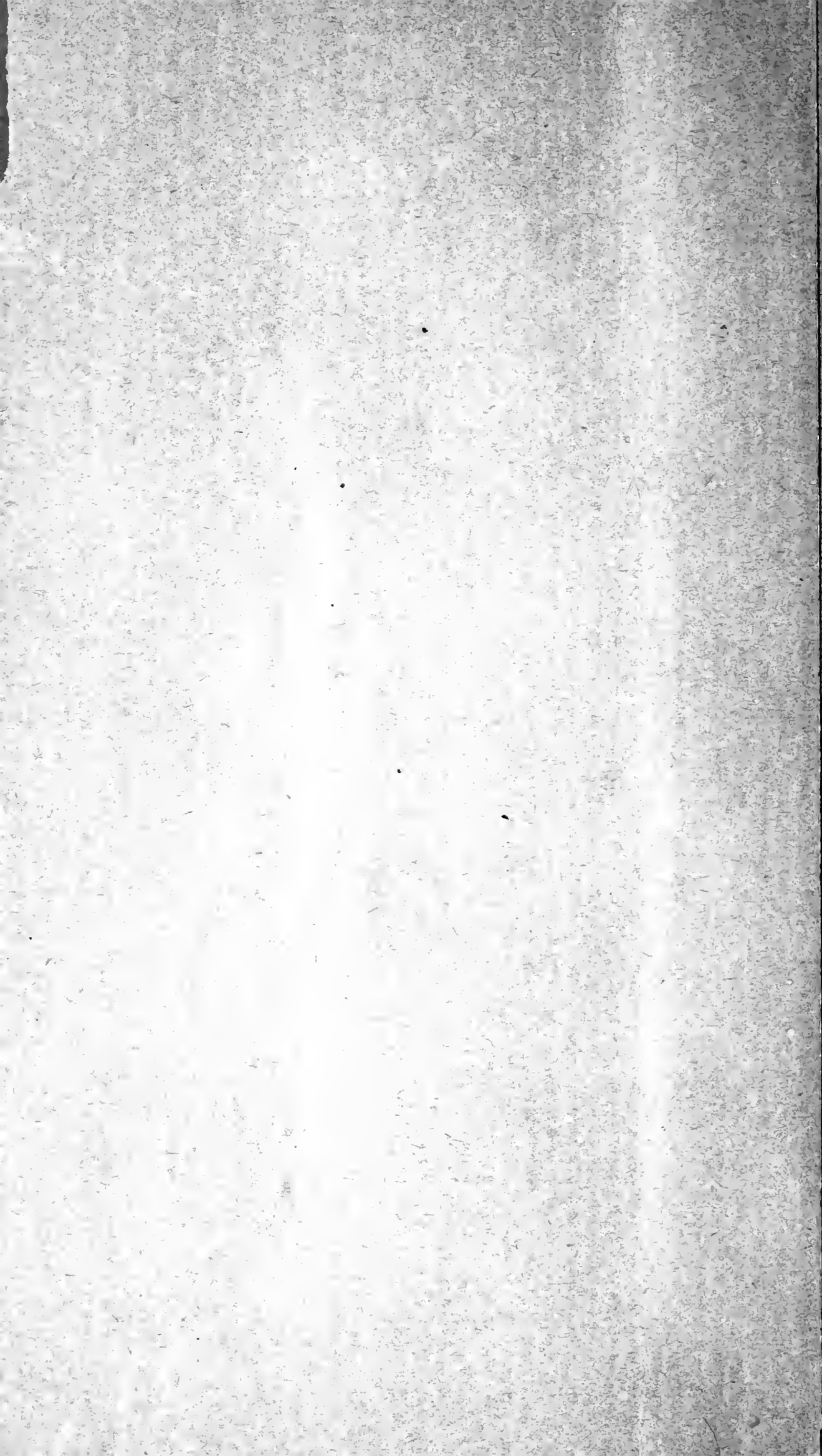


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Thought on the
American Revolution
Richard Price
1786



[Mirabeau, Honore. G. R.]

REFLECTIONS

ON THE

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

IMPORTANCE

OF THE

AMERICAN REVOLUTION,

AND THE

MEANS OF MAKING IT

A BENEFIT TO THE WORLD.

By RICHARD PRICE, D. D. L. L. D.



TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF

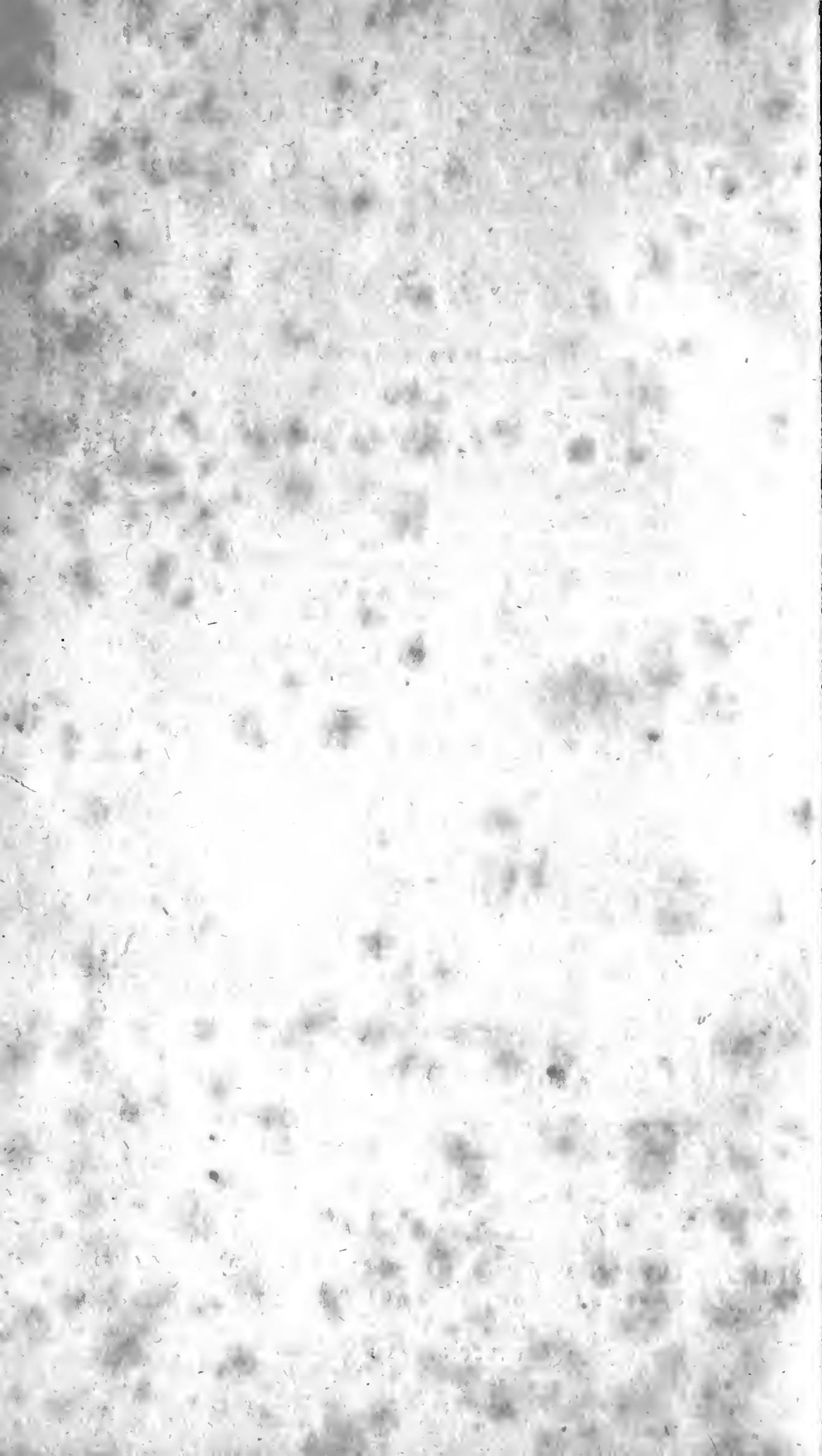
THE COUNT DE MIRABEAU.

A NEW EDITION WITH CONSIDERABLE CORRECTIONS.

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R E F L E C T I O N S

O N T H E

O B S E R V A T I O N S, &c. of DR. PRICE.

P E A C E.

WHAT terrible revolutions in the manners and constitution of the united states of America must have been in the contemplation of those, who have supposed them threatened with such contests and wars as have converted Europe into a theatre of devastation and murder! Never before had any nation such powerful motives for mutual affection. Never before did such urgent interests strengthen the bonds of fraternity among men. The citizens of each of those states never surely can forget how much they owe to the citizens of all the other states. At every step they cannot but meet some monument of the courage exerted by their friends in defence of liberty. The happiness which they will enjoy must be an eternal pledge of mutual gratitude; and at the distance of a thousand miles from home they must still feel that they are in the bosom of their country.

Whence can the seeds of discord ever be scattered among these nations of brethren? What have they not to conquer from nature, before they can entertain the absurd desire of gaining new possessions? From the sea, quite beyond the mountains, stretches out an immense territory, which must be covered with cottages, with peasants, and with implements of husbandry; and which compels the Americans to direct the activity of their infant population towards a laudable industry. They have a whole world to people before they can find themselves straitened for room. Such is the preservative which they have received from heaven, and which no people ever possessed before; such, independent of their moderation and virtue, is the security of peace to these happy nations.

C O N G R E S S.

The precautions, however, which the respectable writer

of the "Observations on the Importance of the Amer. Rev." points out, are dictated by wisdom. From the august assembly of the continental congress nothing ever can be feared. Its members will always be wisely elected; for a free people never err in the choice of their representatives. The short, the perhaps too short, period of its administration leaves no room for jealousy. The nature of their functions, which are foreign from the internal government of each particular state, forms a sufficient barrier to ambition. They never can conceive the design of usurping the sovereignty, or employing the forces of the confederation against the liberty of any single state.

ITS POWERS TO BE ENLARGED.

Repose confidence, therefore, in the congress, and enlarge its powers. Be judged by the delegates of all your provinces; or in other words, be your own judges. Nothing will resist the decisions of an impartial justice. Arm, however, your judges with such a power as cannot be dangerous; arm them with your whole strength to enforce their sentences. Thus will your decrees, pronounced by the lips of your judges, be executed by yourselves.

No free man, undoubtedly, will ever think of entrusting mercenaries with the defence of that country, which has been dyed with your blood. The time, thank heaven! is now arrived, when patriotism will cease to be a hatred of human kind; when the prosperity of a free state will cease to be founded on the lust of empire, as it was at Rome, or on the love of war, as was the case at Sparta. But human nature is still the same. Nothing great ever was, or ever will be, achieved without urgent motives, and some degree of enthusiasm. Reason alone, and ideas of order and justice, without the art to convert them into passions, will never keep alive that activity which is essential to liberty. Liberty cannot long survive the moment when it ceases to be the highest and most sensible of enjoyments. In order that it may be preserved, your passion for it must never abate. Enjoyment must never weaken its charms; but every day must revive in your souls that sentiment of intoxication, which you felt at the first shout of victory.

E D U C A T I O N.

Would you obtain this great effect, address yourselves to the senses: address them perpetually: place constantly before the sight, the deplorable scenes of your servitude, and the enchanting picture of your deliverance. Begin with the infant in his cradle: let the first word he lisps be the name of WASHINGTON. Let his first lessons of history

tory be the wrongs which you suffered, and the courage which set you free. Let his daily prayers be expressions of gratitude to God, for raising you up accomplished chiefs; for leading on your armies; and for strengthening the arms of your peasants, against the discipline and the tyranny of Europe. Let the youth, the hope of his country, grow up amidst annual festivals, commemorative of the events of the war, and sacred to the memory of your heroes. Let him learn from his father to weep over the tombs of those heroes, and to bless their virtues. Let his first study be your declaration of independence, and the code of your constitutions, which were sketched out amidst the clashing of arms. Let him stop at the end of the field which he ploughs, and, while the tears start into his eyes, let him read, engraved upon the rude stones; *here Savages in the pay of despotism, cast an infirm old man into the flames: here they dashed against the trees, children, snatched from the breasts of their dying mothers; there the satellites of oppression bent the knee, demanded their lives, and became captives.* Let the calendar record, throughout the year, those immortal acts, to which you owe your freedom. Let the sword, which his father once used in the defence of his family, the sword with which he will himself be girt, when he shall attain the age of reason and of strength, be bound to his plough. Let the instrument of war, thus united to the implement of peace, renew that language of signs, which in antient times was employed with such effect for less sacred purposes. Let it tell him, what, having thus learned, he never can forget, that the pride of a free man braves all dangers, but never disturbs the public order: that human blood ought to be lavished for liberty, but ought to flow for no other cause: that war is horrible, if it be unnecessary: that it is the reproach of the mercenary who sells his life for gold, or for the detestable honour of cool barbarity, but that it consigns to immortality the patriot hero, who devotes his life for his brethren.

Intoxicated with the love of liberty, like those antient Germans, who, in the language of Tacitus, *libertatem deperibant, utpote sanguine partam*, let this young hero, at frequent intervals, quit the toils of husbandry, to kindle his public spirit amidst warlike exercises; let him learn the use of arms, and accustom himself to discipline in the sight of the most respectable citizens. Let him, in their presence, pledge himself to defend his country and its laws.

A M I L I T I A.

Of such men be your troops composed. Leave it to the monarchs of Europe to distribute and to class different ranks, and to pay them with riches and with conventional honours . . . but

. . . but with you be every important function united. Let the husbandman be the soldier and the representative of the state; let him contribute his labours, his courage, and his knowledge to the public prosperity; and let him not think that his debt to his country can be discharged by a less tribute than that of his whole existence.

Fear nothing from a militia thus constituted. Be this the strength with which you arm the congress for the execution of its judgments. Be this the barrier which you oppose to the inroads of the Indians, if your humanity and beneficence cannot gain you their friendship. Be this your safeguard against the attacks of European nations, who then will never venture to interrupt your domestic peace.

But great indeed is the task which remains to be performed After having set the noble example of a philosophical legislation, arising from the midst of carnage, set the still more admirable example of a wise and noble modesty. Revise your laws. Attend to public virtues. Imagine institutions which may perpetuate them. Complete what you have so well begun. Take no rest till you have attained the highest perfection of which human nature is susceptible; nor suffer by your neglect the most auspicious moment for the happiness of the human species to pass unimproved.

These ideas I need not observe belong to the venerable author of the work I have above alluded to; I will venture, however to reject his opinion upon the nature of the various powers with which he thinks the continental congress ought to be invested. "It must be trusted," says he, "with a power of procuring supplies for defraying the expences of the confederation; of contracting debts, and providing funds for discharging them." I am far from concurring in this opinion, and I offer my objections to Dr. Price himself, as a tribute due to his love of truth and of mankind.

LOANS TO BE AVOIDED.

The most fatal deception of what in Europe is called POLITICS, has been to suppose CREDIT useful, and to throw a part of the duties of the present upon future generations. This horrible system originates in a want of patriotism; and paves the way for a revolution, which, whether distant or near at hand, is certainly inevitable, and will strike the world with terror. The burthen is continually increasing; the exigencies of every year are aggravated with the weight of all which have gone before. Every loan creates a necessity of future loans; so that the only end of this boasted policy, is to render the public service impossible, or in other words, to dissolve the society; an evil which can be no other-
wise

wife avoided, than by a violation of faith, and the general destruction of property . . . Free republicans, guard against the contagion of slavery. Remember, that to become what you ought to be, you must entirely forget what you were.

A true patriot wholly devotes himself to his country. He pays his debt to it every year with joy, suffers no arrears of it to accrue, and never postpones till to-morrow, the duty of to-day. In his own person he performs every service of the state; whether by seizing, and delivering over to the law, the enemies and disturbers of society; or by opening and maintaining the communications which are necessary to internal commerce and the public welfare; or by hearing and deciding all disputes amongst his brethren; or by resisting the inroads of all hostile invaders, with the same hand with which he directs his plough across the field, his little and his only patrimony. The performances of such services as these depends not on loans, and scarcely even on money, but on personal exertions: and in such services is the generous sentiment of patriotism manifested, nourished, and transmitted to posterity.

Discharge then the debts which you contracted for the noblest of causes, at a crisis which admitted neither of deliberation or delay, but CONTRACT NO NEW ONES. Let all that you owe to your country be discharged at the close of every year; and begin the new year by resuming the same labours, which will again be rewarded with the same enjoyments. Behold with terror yon city, the capital of your ancient empire, loaded with the burden of her paper circulation, her credit, and her bank; yet intoxicated with the splendid phantom of her opulence; and hastening, by her greedy credulity, or by her presumptuous confidence, the arrival of that dreadful moment, when she must start from her long dream . . . And do you, peaceful, happy, and modestly proud of having vindicated the rights of human nature, shun, so sad an example, and demonstrate to the world, how true happiness may be promoted under the auspices of liberty, by moderation, order, and œconomy.

CONTRACT NO DEBTS.

The first loan made amongst you, will attest with certainty, the decline of that spirit which ought to animate you. It will be to shift upon others, the task imposed by nature and by your oaths upon yourselves, and to discharge only the twentieth part of your duties. It will be a gross injustice,

justice, which will load your posterity with the burden of your services and of their own (1).

It will be a fatal contagion, which speedily destroying your

NOTES.

(1) This is what no person has ventured to say hitherto, except one English writer, who, in a very recent work, of which but few copies have been printed, and which has been given to none but his friends, has pointed out the injustice and illegality of loans. The passage appears to me to be so well written, and so unanswerable, that I could not resist the pleasure of inserting it here.

“ It is the birthright of an Englishman not to be taxed, but by representatives of his own immediate choice*. If this right had been attended to, all supplies demanded by government would have been raised within the year: for the constitutional method of voting supplies was this—The service being announced from the throne, the house of commons decided, whether it was more prudent, and more for the interest of the public and their constituents, to sustain the expence, or to stop the service. But this principle was violated, when the supplies ceased to be raised within the year, and to be thrown upon posterity. For, when five millions were the sum to be raised, and raised within the year, they who imposed sustained the burden. The evil might be sufficient for the day, but it expired with it; whereas, if five millions are raised by mortgage, they who grant it, charge themselves with no more than the simple interest, which is but £.250,000, whilst they charge both principal and interest of five millions upon their children and their children’s children.”

“ *We give and grant* is the language of money bills; but it was meant to express the *gift and grant* of *their own* property who made the offer, but not the property of posterity.

“ This violation of the principles of the constitution will appear in yet stronger colours when you consider, that the accumulation of the national debt has now brought the interest alone to ten millions, to be levied *every year within the year* on the inhabitants of Great-Britain. But what had we to do in choosing those men who imposed this exorbitant rent-charge upon us? They were the representatives, some of the last, some of the present century, but not one of them elected by those on whom the payment of these taxes falls.

“ It is an unpleasant theme to dwell upon.—But the deviation from the principles of the constitution, in levying taxes on posterity,

“ * The security that an Englishman formerly had against an abuse of the power of taxation was this,—that the member of parliament himself, paid his proportionate share of every tax that he consented to impose; so that he could not injure the property of his electors without impairing his own. But this security has long been done away by the effects of influence; and since parliament became so great a part of the trade of Exchange-alley, we see how the fortunes of subscribers to public loans are aggrandized, by the very act of impoverishing their constituents.”

your virtues, will awaken avarice, multiply intrigues, and bend the loftiness of your souls to the meanness of stock-jobbing. Your country will soon be forgotten; and the field of honour, the asylum of liberty, will be converted into an exchange of traders.

But should the Americans make no loans in future, for how many ages will they not be incumbered with the burden of their present debt, which must be paid at last; and what credit can they enjoy till this debt shall be discharged?

CREDIT UNNECESSARY.

The actual debt of the united states is computed to amount to nine millions sterling. This they undoubtedly must pay; not in order to gain credit hereafter, which, even were the resolution of never making loans not enrolled amongst their fundamental laws, would be to them a most fatal advantage, but because justice requires it; and justice is the first of virtues; and the new republic is lost, if she cease to adore virtue.

NOTES.

“terity, appears to me as a breach of the duty of a private man, of the citizen, and of the statesman. For the duty of a private man (the *pater-familias*) is to protect, not injure, the inheritance of his children; the duty of the citizen is to sacrifice his personal and temporary interest, to the permanent advantage and future welfare of his country. The difference betwixt a good and a bad statesman consists in this, that the one provides for the exigencies of the day, the other guards against events that may endanger public safety in times to come. It is moreover a duty we owe our sovereign, not to obstruct his designs for the public good; and, least of all, to embarrass him in the execution of his first and greatest charge, that of defending and protecting his people. But this wretched system of forestalling the national resources, is if possible more injurious to the state of the king, than of the subject; for, having the greatest interest in the preservation of the state, he is most injured in having the means of defence taken out of his hands; and under the weight of our present debt, how is the crown to undertake any measures, even of national defence, without heaping oppressions on the oppressed, and without striking deeper at public credit, already wounded, perhaps beyond cure?”

The evil appears to this writer to be so great, that he does not hesitate to say, that “if the debt be swelled beyond its present magnitude, he must resort to antiquity for an expression to describe the situation of Great Britain: DEUS, ETIAM SI DEUS VOLUIT, SERVARE REMPUBLICAM NON POTEST.” *Political letters, written in March and April, 1784. London: printed by William Richardson in the Strand. Letter X. p. 54 and 55.*

To speak without reserve. I cannot approve the arithmetical spirit which reigns throughout the chapter upon public debts. One reads of nothing but of millions, and of the means of increasing them; of growing interest; of a produce, which in a few years doubles its capital, tripples it, multiplies it to a degree which I had rather admit without investigation, than pore over the disgusting calculation . . . Why this dazzling display of gold before the eyes of the sons of freedom, and the cultivators of a land favoured by heaven? What avail the means, whether real or imaginary, of becoming rich and corrupted, where the only object to be pursued, is to establish the reign of virtue and happiness? Your debt, my friends, amounts to nine millions. Pay it quietly, gradually, without any extraordinary effort, by judicious contributions levied upon the land owners; deny yourselves, for a time, some of the comforts of life. That sacrifice will be the price of your liberty: can it then be burthensome to your brave and generous minds? Let every public service be discharged by yourselves; let the contribution diminish in proportion as the debt is discharged; and let the funds which the confederation will no longer stand in need of, be applied in the cultivation of your fruitful soil, which will pour into your hands those pure treasures, for which you will have only Providence to thank.

It is, alas, next to impossible, for the most just and enlightened understandings, to keep entirely clear of the prejudices which surround them. It is from England that you are addressed; it is from England that you are advised to establish a permanent credit, and to form a continental patrimony for the united states.

CREDIT! . . . It is a worm which gnaws the vitals of the state. The wisdom of man, be assured, is to distrust himself. Were the time ever to arrive when your zeal should abate; when private interest should weigh down the public weal; when every man should prize his own fortune above the state; the habit of making loans would then be confirmed; you would borrow instead of acting; you would convert the services of free citizens into the services of mercenaries; and that extremity of the world, on which the hopes of all the rest of mankind repose, would become a dishonoured country; whose example would furnish tyrants with one principle more, on which to justify their oppression of the human species

You have to begin every thing anew. Adopt nothing from declining states, which, by prejudices, revolutions, and habits, are diseased beyond all cure. Their most deplorable ignorance is that of the evils which beset them. Their most mortal disease is the blindness of their inveterate passions, which

which lose the very desire of being cured. The principle of those evils which threaten the child at the moment of its birth, escapes the keenest eye, but it carries in it contagion and death. It is the same with states. In the first false idea, in the first unjust principle which is blended in their infant constitution, exists the source of their misfortunes, and their ruin: and this evil is the more dangerous, because the fermentation of it will be slow, and difficult to foresee. The smallest leaven of vice or error is sufficient to set, unperceived, the manners and laws at variance, and to effect the dissolution of republics, in appearance the best constituted.

All states at present confound money and riches, riches and happiness, splendor and power, fame and true glory. Shun these errors, and sow not the seeds of them in your republics. Know, and be it ever remembered amongst you, that moderation alone can render you happy, numbers and courage powerful, and virtue truly glorious. Be this then your constant rule of conduct. Every thing which may corrupt your manners, damp your zeal, and divert you from your duties as men, and as citizens, is a mighty evil, which, dangerous already, will become, in process of time, an infallible source of destruction to your nation. Loans are a complication of all these disorders. Be it then an invariable law with you never to borrow.

NO CONTINENTAL DOMAINS IN THE HANDS OF CONGRESS.

Our author has another idea which could take birth nowhere but in the midst of those prejudices which infest the old-age of empires. He advises you to form a continental domain in the hands of congress; and by this precaution to prepare the way for the time when you will no longer have to render any services to your country; even were the calculations of this political arithmetic just, that would alone be a reason to reject the result of them. Frame your constitutions rather in such a manner that your country may always need the assistance of its sons, and your citizens the protection of their common parent. To the sentiment of this reciprocal dependence, providence has united the finest emotions in nature, and man cannot but err unless he imitate this noble order. Can you be ignorant that the pursuit of means to support the public weal, independent of public patriotism, takes its rise from a vague sentiment which supposes that happiness can be found in idleness, sloth, and personal interest? Will not such an institution necessarily encourage and promote those dispositions of mind which first suggested it? and if those dispositions be the most fatal poison of a

free state, what are we to think of the establishments which have such a tendency ?

Public domains have ever been the engines by which the distant servitude of nations has been prepared by their chiefs. And shall they be the first institution of a free people ? Public domains entrusted perpetually to the administration of the representatives of your states ! What are they but a power, independent of your will, committed to those, whose sole function is to express your will by public statutes ? and to what purpose ? In order to release you from your duties ! . . . With one blow you would strike at public virtue and at liberty. The same institution would render you corrupt and indifferent about the public, and deliver up your posterity to servitude. This single law would destroy all which it is incumbent on you to defend. The least misfortune which could then befall you, would be for the deputies of your provinces to become more indifferent about the public good, than ambitious. If, considering the possessions entrusted to them as public property, they neglect the cultivation of them, you abandon to sterility the lands which providence has enjoined you to improve : or, if treating this property as their own, they render it fertile, you condemn your children to be slaves ; in all events you stifle patriotism and liberty in their very birth.

Never enrich the men whom you would preserve incorrupt. The contagion of gold is dangerous to the purest minds ; and the boasted grandeur of modern nations is nothing but the power of bribery over baseness Free republicans ! if you cherish in your hearts any other desires than those of an extensive cultivation, of wide population, and of that happiness, which fathers, mothers, children, brethren, and citizens enjoy in the innocence of nature, in the warmth of affection, and in the bosom of their country, you have not deserved the love and admiration which you have inspired, you will deceive the hopes of mankind : you will become what we are—nothing, nay, worse than nothing ; for it were better not to exist, than to be vicious and miserable.

C O M M E R C E.

But what ray of celestial light has pierced through the darkness which surrounds us, and inspired the virtuous writer with the wise sentiments which he entertains upon commerce ! What praise does he not deserve for having seen and felt, amid the delusions of wealth, and the calculations of avarice, that external commerce must ruin your states ! How warm must have been his love of liberty and of virtue,

to overcome those prejudices, which, in his country, attach an idea of grandeur and of force to mercantile speculation! Read this chapter again and again. Engrave it in your public halls, on tables of marble, and of brass. Or rather engrave it on tables of gold. It may make a more lively impression on your minds, when you see that corrupting metal, which has undone mankind, serving for once the cause of wisdom and truth, and recording the condemnation of that avarice which itself enflames.

Commerce, considered as the means of uniting men, and connecting them together, is ordained by nature! It increases that fraternal affection for one's fellow creatures, which every ingenuous mind feels to be irresistible. That men, connected together by obeying the same laws, sharing the same government, and inhabiting the same country, should make mutual exchanges of services, and of industry; that, in a more extensive confederation, they should establish some representative sign of these mutual exchanges, is perfectly natural and beneficial to mankind; but when once commerce exceeds those limits, it becomes dangerous and pernicious to every nation to which it is not necessary.

Commerce, considered as a means of living at the cost of foreign nations, is necessary to the people who inhabit countries which do not afford them a subsistence. The miracles of industry which such a situation has produced, are so bewitching, that they have deceived all Europe; and deceived it to such a degree, as to make this speculating activity be mistaken for the true source of prosperity to every nation. A capital and a fatal error, which has confounded what is only astonishing with what is useful! and has obscured this important truth, that the very same resources which are necessary to nations labouring under natural disadvantages, are the scourges of those societies which are favoured by nature!

Would you estimate foreign commerce truly? Consider first what is of essential benefit to human societies.

Liberty, personal safety, population, virtue, and courage, are of essential benefit to them. Every thing beyond these is indifferent; every thing destructive of these is prejudicial.

The principle of an active foreign commerce is the love of riches. Such a commerce is, therefore injurious to morality. The love of riches never dwelt long in the same breast with enthusiasm; consequently it must weaken, and soon extinguish all sentiments of liberty and of courage. The merchant, whose soul is contracted by calculations, and whose heart is consumed with desires, considers honesty as a necessary, rather than as an amiable quality. Virtue, like every thing else, becomes the subject of speculation. From that moment,

moment, adieu to morality, adieu to patriotism, adieu to public spirit. What attachment can ever bind inseparably to his country the man, who can transport, in his manual art, or in bills of exchange, his whole property to some other country, and enjoy it there in peace? * What is the

NOTES.

* The author in his warmth forgets that states are made for the convenience of men, not men for the formation of states. Security of property is the object of government, the enjoyment of that property forms a limit to government. Landed property cannot be moved. If individuals turn land into a transportable property, it is by exchange with other individuals who remain to cultivate it. The person, which is of no consideration to the state, is only changed. The easy transition of property is one of the greatest blessings of humanity: not as we can by this means suit our inclinations, our genius, or our constitutions, but as we can chuse to live under that government where is the greatest security, the most perfect peace, and most happiness. Love of our *country*, so much recommended in the text, has been the cause of the greatest succession of evils with which mankind have been cursed. Whoever has read the Grecian and Roman histories cannot be ignorant of the number of nations butchered by the inculcation of this principle. The wars could never have been carried on by the legislatures of the French and English nations had this not been a received duty among the commonality of those nations. This *amor patriæ*, this national pride is a charm that lulls to sleep the subjects of a bad government. What an instance of human frailty is this lamentable infatuation? What a diffidence we should have of our powers when we consider that from this love of the *country* the Turk, the Russian, the French, and even the Englishman, kiss and embrace the chains that clog them, and adore the very *faults* of their constitutions?—In a *free* government there is no occasion to bring in the passions to support it. We have acted from their impulse long enough. We should now act from reason. No wars are necessary, no conquest desired. Man is designed on this globe simply to enjoy the fruits of it, and not to domineer over and destroy his race. In the present enlightened age the sentiment should not be *love of country*, but *love of liberty*. The spot on this earth on which an individual is situated is immaterial, provided he has the free enjoyment of the comforts of life. Americans, let not the motive of your actions be other than the *love of liberty*; seek not the aggrandizing of your vast continent, and much less of a particular state or town. Love or value the liberty that is enjoyed in your state; if it is perverted, seek liberty elsewhere. Contribute to the support of this liberty; guard it with the hundred eyes of an Argus; and if there is an invader repel him, not from a love of the country, but to secure a liberty that is so seldom if any where else to be met with. No man will say that the late war was, on our side, a war of territory, it was a war for liberty.

state to him any further, than as it protects him in the acquisition of his fortune? His desires, far from uniting him with the public, separate him from it, and render him a solitary being, intent upon nothing but his own private good.

Such are the moral consequences of a thirst after commerce. Let us now see what is its physical influence.

If you pay the foreign trader as much as you sell him in industry, to what purpose those exertions, which only multiply unprofitable enjoyment, and without adding any thing to your happiness, accelerate your corruption? If your exports be greater than your imports, then you will doubtless be convinced that you are in the road to prosperity; and then you will in fact be hastening to your destruction. Streams of gold will pour in upon you from every quarter. The most crafty, and still more the most rapacious, will seize upon this wealth. Poverty will become the portion of the virtuous and modest, whose fortunes, un-augmented in this prosperity, will bear no proportion to the increased prices of provisions. Inequality of fortune, the fatal source of all misery and of all guilt, the poison of all liberty and of all virtue, will desolate your states. Opulence will be power. Poverty will be abandoned to scorn and oppression. All services will become mercenary. Avarice will spread its infection through every part of the state. Every magistrate will become venal; every law will have its price; every honour will be put up to sale; and, as a just punishment for these false speculations of the basest passions, even commerce will at last prey upon and destroy itself. The treasures which it will have produced, will have raised the price of industry so high, that all competition with other nations will be impossible. Your markets will be forsaken, your ports abandoned, and, ignorant, alike how to employ your gold, and how to get rid of it, your nations, ruined by the very excess of their imaginary riches, will lose their commerce without recovering that innocence and happiness which they will have sacrificed to their idol. Your hands will then be stretched out to receive the chains of the first ambitious usurper who thinks fit to enslave you, and your treasures will become the prize of the first robber who pleases to make them his own.

Such has ever been the fortune of commercial nations.

Judge now of modern politics. Judge of the senseless pride of our calculating philosophers, who dare to despise ancient legislations, and who prefer their own barren arithmetic to the language of the most affecting wisdom. See to what they lead us. See what has been the fate of those nations who have followed these deceitful guides. But for her admirable constitution, your antient parent country would

not

not at this moment exist. That constitution fights the battles of England better than her armies: but yet, did not the sea guard her island; could civil liberty be once violated amongst her sons with impunity: were not morality and domestic order amongst them still preserved untainted by their separation from the continent; had you not rendered them the service of checking their pride, think what would have become of the remains of their liberty, and their power, in the midst of a tumult of factions, an excessive inequality of fortune, a venality of parties, the disorders of bankruptcies, the fluctuations of credit, the terrors of avarice, an excessive load of taxes of every denomination and of every kind, their enormous national debts, and the oppression, which even industry suffers by being crushed under a load of riches amassed during so many years! You will owe every thing that you have valuable to England. Her injustice has given you liberty; let her errors teach you lessons of wisdom.

NO PROHIBITIONS.

Do I then advise you to pass laws against commerce? to establish prohibitions, and to prescribe any descriptions of occupations or of labour? . . . God forbid! Liberty and property, those sacred and inalienable rights, are the basis of your constitution. Be careful never to shake them. Forbid nothing but what is criminal, but encourage nothing but what is good. This is the sum of all my admonitions. Let all your laws tend to an equality of fortune. Let the father's estate, distributed amongst all his children, multiply citizens, and bring all families to one level. Let the immense territory which is at your disposal be portioned out to whoever has the means of cultivating it. Give it gratuitously. Never sell it. Never persuade yourselves that you have a right to sell those countries covered with primitive forests, which belong only to nature, and over which labour alone can confer a title. Encourage, comfort, aid, and protect, with all the power of government, the planters, who purchase the happiness of living amongst you with the fertilizing sweat of their brows. The commerce which is truly profitable, is the importation of the poor and the industrious, from every quarter of the globe. Grant the right of being represented in the national assemblies, to every proprietor of a certain extent of land, ascertained by law. Remember that no man is more than a single individual; that he has but one soul, and can profit the state only his single faculties. Never, therefore, consider the rich more than the poor. If an hundred acres give a right of suffrage, let a hundred thousand give no more. By this apparent inequality, which is in fact only a
more

more strict and considerate justice, you will impress upon the infancy of your societies, the visible token of that same spirit which presided over their birth. You will take from avarice its strongest incentives, ambition and power. You will transmit to succeeding generations your own disregard of riches. . . . Thus are the virtues of nations formed, by directing their ideas in a certain channel, from which they cannot afterwards deviate.

Leave the merchant, who erects warehouses, builds vessels, and pursues his speculations, to prefer, if he will, the dull arithmetic of his counting-house, to the enchanting prospect of nature—to the affecting luxuriance of the country. . . . Let his property be as sacred as that of any other man; let his liberty be inviolable under the empire of law. But he is only an inhabitant; and not a citizen of your nation. He has chosen to belong to no country but the world at large. He may, when he pleases, have a country. He may convert his personal property into land; and this change, the most favourable to the spirit of your government, and to the manners of your people, will be the highest ambition of all your inhabitants. Thus, without force, without restraint, without laws, without prohibitions, and without injustice you will ensure pre-eminence to the innocent, and fraternal art of agriculture, to that art which doubles population, encourages virtue, nourishes the lofty spirit of free minds, supplies the state with defenders, counsellors, and domestic arbitrators, and (since riches must be ever in view) produces that substantial wealth, which may multiply without engendering luxury and corruption.

Scorn the pitiful and iniquitous shifts which commercial states have practised to prevent the importation of foreign commodities. Here again I venture to combat the opinion of your venerable friend. Concern yourself neither about the protection, nor about the prevention, or the regulation of commerce: Take no thought about trade, but entirely overlook it. If it be advantageous, it should be left free, because liberty alone can make it thrive. If on the other hand it be pernicious, let it be free still; because the infringement of liberty is a greater evil than the existence of abuses. Because it is absurd to think of carrying on commerce with foreign nations, by permitting them to buy your commodities, and at the same time refusing to take theirs in exchange; for in that case they will certainly never deal with you. Because, in short, amidst all the everlasting contests of self-interest, which finds itself embarrassed with its own rules, there is only one fixed principle, that of morality: and morality requires that every man's property should be at his own free disposal. The only

just and reasonable maxim to be adopted, therefore, is, to derive every possible advantage from your own country, to limit the wants of nature by plenty, and those of luxury by moderation.

THE CONSTITUTIONS.

The excellent writer, whose work has given rise to these reflections, has said little about your constitutions; but he has communicated to you the short, but invaluable observations of a true philosopher. All that was necessary to be said about them is contained in the letter of the immortal Turgot. In framing your constitutions, the form of the English government has too frequently occurred to your remembrance. What is well adapted to England, is ill calculated for America. Let there be no balance of powers—no complicated constitutions. Are your removeable governors kings? Are your executive councils peers? Have you, or can you have any other representatives than assemblies of citizens, equal by nature and by law? Assemblies which are not the *commons* (as patrician insolence has styled them) but **THE NATION**. Ill betide those corrupted nations, among whom the master-piece of the human intellect has been to create a phantom of peace by means of discord, and to excite a contest of the passions in order to obtain their equilibrium! Deem more nobly of yourselves. Pursue the direct path to wisdom. Let public virtue be your object, and think not of counteracting the interests of one body of men by those of another. Begin not as others have ended; and poison not the innocent simplicity of your infancy by the subtleties of depraved manhood.

Nor let me be told that you spring from antient nations, and are not in that state of infancy which I imagine.

Individuals amongst you may be old, but your nation is still young. You have experienced revolutions, which ought to have given new birth to every man amongst you. Are you not in another climate beyond the limits of the ocean? Are not your customs different from those of your former country? Have you not been engaged in war, and little less than civil war? Which of you has not passed the ordeal trial of misery and danger? Which of you has not shed his blood in the noble cause of freedom? Which of you has not to bewail the death of a father, a wife, a child, or a friend, sacrificed in the arduous contest? Be assured that you are beings of no antiquated or vulgar race. You retain of the old world nothing but its knowledge, and the virtues of the new world are all your own.

No reformation, I venture to persuade myself, is necessary

ry in your manners ; but nothing should be neglected to preserve their purity. Forget not the force of education. Your excellent friend knew its influence, and treats of it at length : but though every thing he has said upon it be judicious, he has by no means exhausted the subject. Remember that the education of youth consists less in admonishing them, than in the examples and objects with which they are surrounded ; and that almost all the misfortunes of our ancient empires, arise from the contrast between the precepts instilled into the infant, and the examples placed before the youth. But with you the characters of the parent and the child, of the young and the old, ought to correspond in every respect. The plan of education which I have described at the beginning of these reflections, was not meant as a vain declamation or an unmeaning rhapsody. What I have painted with all the warmth of a soul glowing with zeal for your happiness, it behoves you to execute by the force of your institutions. Multiply your monuments, rites, and commemorative ceremonies †. Already you have given reason all the weight of authority, by consecrating the rights of mankind into positive laws. Amongst you, those eternal truths, those noble principles, are no longer subjects of dispute, but ordinances of the legislature. At the very outset of your career, you have taken a giant's stride towards the improvement of the human species, and towards strengthening the monument erected by your hands : go on and complete your work. Form by instruction, and still more create by example, and by the only efficacious and permanent impression,

NOTES.

† Why are rites and commemorative ceremonies to be appointed? These very things have led to superstition in every quarter of the globe. The most simple and the most sacred have been subverted, and undergone the most ridiculous and absurd alterations : a repetition of the experiment here would, without doubt, be attended with a similar, as it is a never failing effect. Education is of the highest importance. Parents and the legislature cannot direct too much of their attention to it, but let this education be the strongly inculcating sentiments of liberty, industry, and religion, instead of the observance of rites and ceremonies. Let the minds and consciences of individuals be the bulwark against the perversion of the liberty we now enjoy. Make them sensible of the value of freedom, and they will defend it pure from every adulterating cause. The intention and origin of rites and ceremonies are always forgot or misunderstood by the generality of mankind : men of reading and leisure only are acquainted with them, and they never observe them. The attachment should be to principles, and not to particular events or particular individuals which they commemorate, as they are to be feared as delusive.

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that of external signs, a generation, worthy the epoch of your revolution; a race of men, which constantly growing up in the principles of wisdom, will love justice and moderation, detest ambition and war, those scourges of mankind, and at length display to the world, the union, hitherto so uncommon, of knowledge with virtue, and of peace with liberty. Let tyrants tremble at the very name of your happy regions! Let the oppressed ever find an asylum there! and may some gleam of happiness be reflected from your coasts, which may at least alleviate the misfortunes of the old world!

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